



"However the image enters, its force remains..."
- Audre Lorde

CORADDI

University of North Carolina
at Greensboro's
Magazine of the
Arts

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Art and Fiction Issue Spring 1996

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Coraddi was established in March of 1897 as a literary quarterly of the State Normal and Industrial College. When the Normal became the North Carolina College for Women in 1919, the State Normal became Coraddi. Cornelian, Ad for Adelpian, and Di for Dikeian. Previous issues of Coraddi and the State Normal Magazine can be found in the tower of the Walter Jackson Library at UNCG.

Coraddi encourages artistic growth and experimentation. Contributions to future issues should be mailed to: Coraddi
Box 11 at the Elliot University Center.
or call 334-5572.

All art work in this issue was not subject to jury.

Due to Coraddi error, the poems on pages 9 & 10 have been reprinted.

Previous Page: *January 1996 II* by Margie Stewart; Oil on Canvas.

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Round Things by Paul Batt; Color Photograph.



Untitled by Heather Convey; Charcoal on paper.



Untitled by Heather Convey; Charcoal on paper.



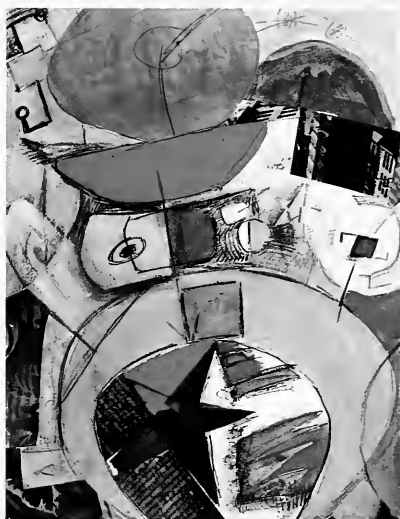
Self Portrait by Leaflin Winecoff; Charcoal/pastel on paper.



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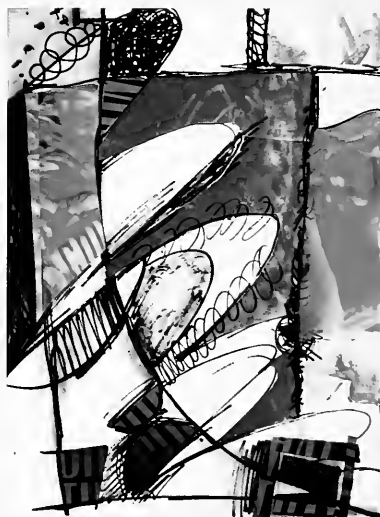
Untitled 1; Collage.



Untitled 2; Collage



Untitled 3; Collage.



Untitled 4; Collage.

Lisa Sussman

Sequence

Cliff Rhodes

The sequence of events,
the songs and screams
in order and degree
are knowledge and pain.
The searing flesh cutting
laser lance love,
the blinding reality
flash of life,
the Truth, the Beauty.
Sinning in seeking.
Itch beyond skin-gouged nails,
and bloody stripes.
Burns through carbon black
white crusty chunks of bone.
Is there a Phoenix of relief?
Bird, animal, man raised;
sacrificed in flame.
Salvation in death,
or rebirth, or death again.
When will it end.
Not life and death,
but existence and non.
How long,
does it go on.



Penazance by Gretchen Kibbe; Fired Clay.

In Memory of Your Home **Heather Mims**

shaggy long strands of carpet will stay
alongside the fat daisies on a flat green
beside them your basket of stuffed animals
the Aha Depeche Mode A Light in the Attic of your shelf
and the tears I wanted to cry because I never knew
you as a little girl
in the next room there will always be the piano
the harpsichord the stereo on which you played
your sadness and me sitting on the couch
wishing it were our kissing holding laughing home
immovable beautiful the candles in the corner
shadows live and bide the time
criss-crossing magnifying *Padre Nuestro*
and *La Virgen* the only woman
whose candlelight face gains sternness without seduction

your mother will sometimes be in the kitchen
her lined Colombian face bearing lifetimes
of silent screams
women whose mouths have always set
cycling sorrow from generation to empty generation
she stands at the counter chopping vegetables
each cut praying for your new beginning
she sets the table with a place for me
but only if I bow my head and accept the blessing
sometimes she will be in the living room
discreetly placed behind your father's chair
book in hand glorifying missionary conquests
a story sermon lip-perched and dramatic

Padre Nuestro, perdona nuestros pecados

the worst times will be those when she succumbs
peers blankly through darkened doorways
knowing wordlessly what should be found
but which you are only too careful to hide
Marina, *Madre Nuestra*, once you liked my visits
we talked of your country your cooking your language
I am no Catholic but I listened when you spoke

I was not a traveler but I learned what you taught
I love your daughter, *madre*
there is no softening trick of translation

Monica, *mi querida*, we will conceive a new home
a stereo a couch kitchen cooking and candles
La Virgen an unwelcome face and the nude sculpture
of me catching daring dancing of flames



Are you Sure? by Oliver Heath; Oil on Paper.



Tunnel Vision/Oblivious by Oliver Heath; Oil on paper.



Self Portrait with Pomegranate II by Karen Ingram;
Acrylic on Canvas.



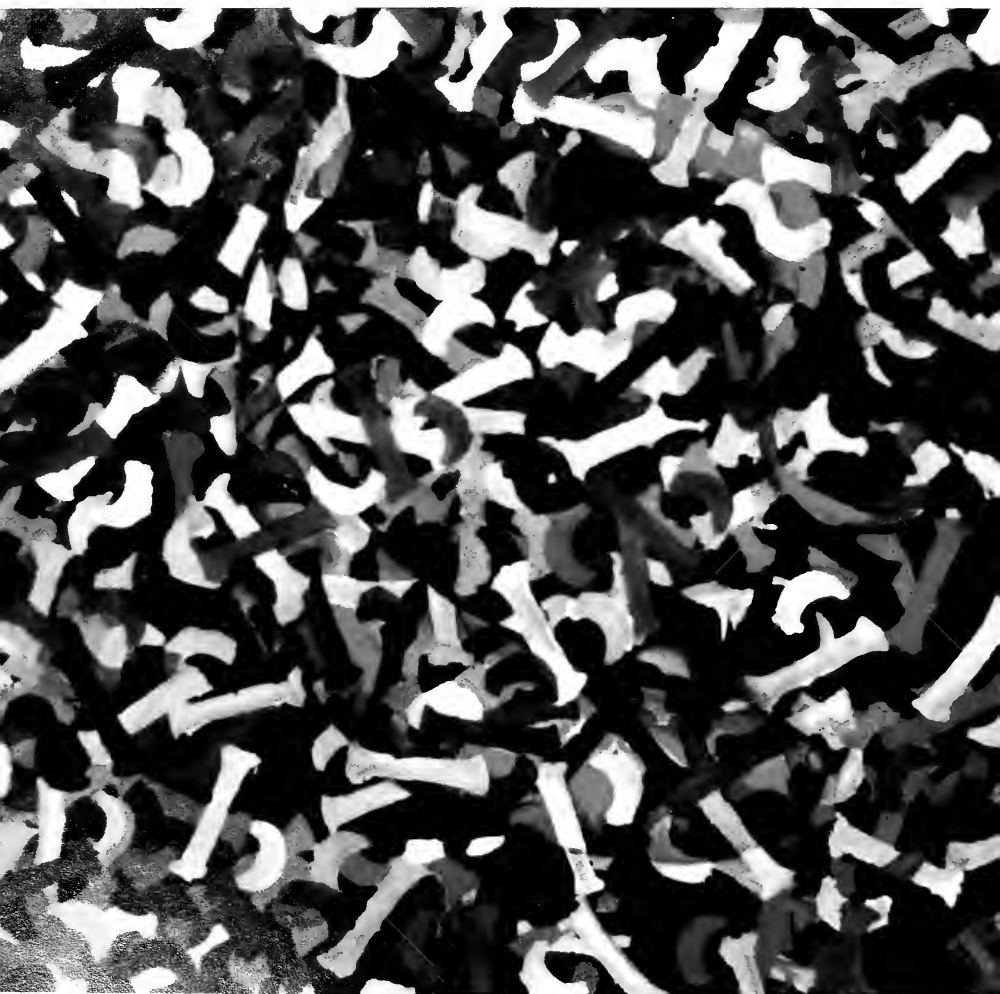
Knife with Pomegranate by Karen Ingram; Acrylic on canvas.



Immortal Cocoon by Beth Waller; Drapery and Copper.



Walking Arch by Gretchen Kibbe: Fired Clay.



Veeds of Interaction by Edward Lowrance: Oil on Canvas.

A Change of Season

John May

Harriss Farwell arrived at the City Club on Saturday morning at about ten. He had been to New York on business that week, and at Brooks Brothers he had purchased a new shirt, a red plaid flannel hunting shirt. They were just putting out the new fall stock, and the plaid caught his eye as the clerk placed several of that pattern in one of the cubicles. On this Saturday morning he wore his new shirt with a pair of khakis; it was the only day of the week that coats and ties were not required at the club, and he always looked forward to dressing well but casually for brunch with his friends before an afternoon of golf or hunting.

It was late August, that time when the games of summer have grown tiresome but before the new football season has begun. Harriss found a leather wing chair in the lounge and read the papers. He read the business section; it was this part of the week when he liked to catch up on the news. He didn't like to watch TV. Four *Wall Street Journals* lay on his lap. His glasses rode mid-nose, and a cup of coffee sat in its saucer on the table beside his chair. For over an hour he was oblivious to everything around him, others who came and went, and the warm sunshine that flooded through the huge windows looking east across the city. No one was more at home here than Harriss.

It finally occurred to him that in the hour or so that he'd been there, virtually no one had said a word to him. He looked at his watch for some explanation. It was after eleven. Extraordinary! He looked around for familiar faces. The lounge was nearly empty; a couple of older men of his

acquaintance sat behind their papers. Usually by this time on Saturday morning at the club, he would be enjoying conversation with half a dozen friends and sipping his usual one Bloody Mary before brunch — he was not a heavy drinker. But on this day not one of his close friends had appeared.

Finally Harriss left the lounge and walked down the long corridor, past the hunting prints, in search of Ramsey.

"Ramsey, where the hell is everybody?" he asked, finding the maitre d' in the foyer.

"Why, Mr. Farwell, at the Dodd's wedding party, of course. I'm surprised you're not there."

"I thought it was a five o'clock wedding," Harriss was alarmed.

"Well, yes, sir, but Mr. Dodd's luncheon at the river?"

Harriss was stunned, then realizing this, he wondered if Ramsey realized it. He considered several alternatives. Ramsey knew that Frank Dodd was one of his dearest friends. The invitation must have gotten lost — probably the move — or was there something else?

"Oh, Lord, I forgot," Harriss said, awkward and embarrassed, looking at his watch. "I suppose there's still time."

He left immediately. On the elevator down to the parking garage, he considered the prospect that, for the first time in his life, he was not invited.

He sat in his car, alone in the parking garage, staring blankly through the windshield at the concrete and steel. The explanation was obvious. Three months earlier Harriss had left his wife of

twenty-three years. It had been a painful and stressful time, but he had decided that his marriage no longer defined him in a positive way, and that it was a mistake to prolong a relationship of two such different people. He imagined Frank Dodd and his wife arguing about which one to invite. He could hear Frank pleading, "But he's my very best friend."

Weddings belong to the mothers, Harriss thought. Frank lost; it was as simple as that. He was not far from tears. And in addition to everything else, no one had seen his new Brooks Brothers shirt. He felt its soft, fine fabric and the equally fine contour of his arm beneath it, and remembered how he'd broken the news to his wife.

"We've become two such different people," he had said to her. "I know you must be very unhappy. Money's no problem. You're still very young. The children are grown. There's nothing holding us."

And that was it. She stared back at him in silence with a look he didn't understand. It was as if he'd missed some obscure point years earlier that was somehow important now.

He'd sublet a condominium from a friend who was moving to Atlanta, in fact the availability of the condominium had a lot to do with the timing of his separation. It was the perfect location. He'd borrowed a few things from the house, had already engaged a decorator, and was enjoying more than he expected the little decisions on color and pattern, and how these things related to the larger question of defining a new life for himself. The word "persona" became an important part of his vocabulary. With each decorating decision, he asked himself if this object or color or pattern was consistent with his new persona, and if so, what exactly was this persona? The search for definition was intoxicating, and he realized that he had become more introspective and that this sig-

nalled new growth. Then, on reflection, he chided himself for not realizing that the great pain and stress he'd suffered must naturally lead to new growth, to a deeper, more sensitive person, to a greater understanding. This self-exploration began to fascinate him, and he decided to become more spontaneous, and he began doing things he would never have done before, things like wearing a red plaid hunting shirt in the heat of August. His rushing-the-season had amused him, and he had looked forward to laughing at his surprising new self with his friends at brunch that Saturday.

Harriss drove back to his condominium wondering what he should do in the hours before the wedding, wondering if, to signal his injured feelings, he should forget the wedding altogether, and he imagined being missed, then he realized that Frank would be furious and would blame his wife and that might spoil the wedding for the Dodds, and he couldn't do that. Anyway, he was bigger than that. He wasn't a sulky child; that was definitely not part of this new persona. He would go, and he would enjoy himself immensely, and just then he remembered the silk foulard paisley tie and vest he'd bought especially for the wedding.

His spirits rose. He grew expansive and generous. He could feel his heart swell in his chest. He could picture himself hugging Sara Dodd, mother of the bride, as he approached her in the receiving line, then he would turn and hug Frank, too. Frank would laugh out loud. "Hey, old buddy," he would yell, and he wouldn't mention the luncheon; it wouldn't be necessary. Harriss' hug would express whatever forgiveness was called for, and that would be that. Harriss could see Frank shake his head in amazement, then say something like, "When this bullshit is over, I want to buy you a drink."

He laughed to himself and longed for five o'clock, but it was not even noon, and

he had nothing to do. Then it occurred to him that he had to have an excuse. "What did you do today?" he could hear some friend ask. "I didn't see you at the luncheon." He couldn't just say he wasn't invited.

The farm, he thought. I'll go to the farm. Hunting season will be here soon. I can say that I went out to the farm to check on things. At first he wasn't sure this would work, but he had to do something that would take time. It was plausible. The farm was really a plantation, an old family home where his sister lived with her family. Harriss didn't call it a plantation; that sounded too pretentious. After their parents died, Harriss had traded properties with her, letting her have the old home place. He cared nothing about living in the country. It wasn't really a working farm, just a home by the river where every fall he and his sister had a huge outdoor party. All of local society was invited along with half the state legislature, and there was always hunting in the morning, so that most of the men wore plaid flannel shirts and corduroy trousers with hunting boots, and most of the women wore jodhpurs with riding boots, and though a huge tent was always erected beside the old plantation house, the grounds inevitably grew muddy and everyone got drunk and ate quail and duck and pheasant, most of it frozen and flown in. It had become a tradition and was a reasonable excuse for far-in-advance preparation.

Harriss did not like to hunt. He did it anyway because not hunting was like not going to the club, but he seldom shot anything and usually spent the morning talking politics or business in the blind with one unfortunate friend or another. He did this rather than watch for birds — watch the skies filled with the crusty, cool weather clouds that come in autumn, and the dying colors of the fields of corn and sorghum, and the golden marsh grass along the river.

Harriss made up his mind, changed course and crossed the South Bresee River Bridge heading into the country. On the south side and fifteen miles upriver was the Farwell home where his sister lived, but she would not be there. She would be at the Dodd's. The drive became gradually more wooded. From time to time signs appeared, noting a fine old home, open for tours, off beyond the trees toward the river, homes that were hundreds of years old, mostly made of brick, some in ruins. Harriss had never seen many of these homes; they held for him the same disinterest as his own family home, but as he drove he realized that once at the farm, there would be nothing to do. "I went out to the farm today," he rehearsed. "Well, I think the governor's coming this year, and it's been so goddamn muddy in the past. We're trying to figure out how to stage this thing. It's just become too pretentious. I liked it better when we just shot a few dove and got drunk."

That would work. It was long enough to take someone's mind off his absence from the luncheon and change the subject altogether to something he'd prefer to talk about anyway — his party. "Oh, hell, I went to the farm today. God! Can you believe it? The governor's coming! Everyone's in a twit because it's always so goddamn muddy. They want us to put a floor down under the tent. I hope it rains like hell. I liked it better when we just shot dove and got drunk."

Satisfied, he suddenly, on some strange impulse, turned off the highway following signs to a famous old plantation home he'd never before seen. This unexpected turn meant that Harriss Farwell, for the first time in years, was going to join an historical tour. At first he was not sure why he'd done it, then he realized, of course, that this new spontaneity was taking over, and he congratulated himself on his newfound ability to cope. It was remarkable, ridiculous

and amusing. But as he approached the parking lot and saw tourists lining up for tickets and a guided tour, he realized that he might see someone he knew.

Tour guides for these homes were often volunteers from the local historical or charitable societies, wives of friends, some too dedicated to use the Dodd luncheon as an excuse not to show up. Surely someone would know him. He could not possibly go inside. He waited in his car until the waiting group was led to the house and the returning group left in their cars, then he got out and walked along the edge of the woods, skirting the broad lawn that surrounded the house. When he passed someone, even from afar, he turned away so as not to be seen. He was thankful that he was wearing his new Brooks Brothers shirt, one that no one would recognize. He unbuttoned the cuffs and rolled his sleeves, a thing he never did, and as he walked, he held a hand between his face and the house, as if in a natural gesture.

Soon he found himself alone at the river. He had not actually looked at the river in years and was struck by the force of its current. The flotsam of upriver fields was trapped in eddies near the bank, and just then he heard a call and looked up to see a flock of wild geese. Without thinking, he counted them, for someone once told him that geese fly only in coveys of odd numbers. There were five of them in tight formation, one to the left of the point bird, three to the right, and their wings beat hard as they hurried across the river. Harriss felt a sudden rush of envy for them as they disappeared beneath the blue sky. And he thought how artists had failed to capture the thrill and freedom of wild geese in flight. He recalled hunting prints that portrayed some birds with wings upraised and others with their wings down or out to the side. The effect was random and wrong; the varia-

tion seemed to destroy the precision and symmetry of perfect freedom.

Across the river, broad flats of wild sawgrass bent constant in the wind and betrayed the coming of fall by yellow glistening edges. The color of the water seemed changed too, from the bright blue of summer to a dull green and brown, a subtle difference, perhaps nothing more than the angle of an afternoon sun or a restless breeze rippling the surface of the river. He stared at the straws and reeds twisting in the eddies, and for the first time in his adult life, Harriss Farwell was scared.



Untitled by Graham Davis; Photograph.

Looking for Florence

Sean Butler

I was wrestling with an adjective at my desk in front of the window in my study when I looked up from the nearly blank page and saw Florence making a break for it in a sweat suit that is best described as fire engine red. She looked neither left nor right but seemed to concentrate on some point three or four blocks down the tree-lined avenue. Her stride was short but smooth, and she moved so purposefully that she looked like a jogger about to shift into a trot.

I was in my summer writing outfit: boxers, a white t-shirt, and dark socks, and by the time I had put on jeans and run out to the front door of our duplex, the old lady in the bright red sweat suit had disappeared. I ran across the street in my socks to the front porch of Florence's house and banged on the screen door. Gump, Florence's husband, was not in his rocking chair on the shady side of the porch screen, and so I ran around to the back yard and found him bent over a tomato plant.

Gump noticed me, and when he stood up and frowned, his big round glasses filled with the white glare of the bright August sun. He shaded his eyes with his right hand, and just then I remembered that he was legally deaf. I shouted "Florence! Florence! Gone! Gone!" while paddling my hands wildly in the air, and then I pointed towards the street. Gump understood immediately; he waddled towards the back door of his duplex and shouted something to someone inside, and a young girl no older than 12 or 13 appeared in the sun-filled door frame.

I am a writer, an artist, and beauty af-

fects me differently than it does most people; if I were like anyone else, I'd be a banker or perhaps a waiter. The sight of this beautiful child, blond, pale-skinned, grey-eyed, and thin-boned, immediately summoned all of my fanciful blood, and I was no longer the concerned neighbor but a soon-to-be hero who would decisively and imaginatively save the day. "I'll get on my bike," I said, "and I'll find her and try to slow her down."

As I jogged back to my duplex, I weighed the situation and found that it was not desperate enough to call the police; Florence was a sweet and docile elderly lady in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's, and in the past few months she had taken to wandering off when Gump became too engrossed in his garden or the evening news. Whenever she got loose, one of the neighbors would sound a kind of general alarm, and several people would strike out on foot or on bike to track her down.

Of all the places in Newport News for an elderly lady to wander around unwatched, our neighborhood was probably the safest. It was a neighborhood of modest white or beige wooden duplexes built in the style of English cottages, of white picket fences, of tree-shaded sidewalks, and of small green lawns with dark green ivy and pink azaleas. Thriving with college faculty and 'artsy types', the neighborhood suited my writer's sensibilities quite nicely. William Styron had even grown up there, and although I had never read one of his books, I used to picture the author (a dark young man in a white suit) strolling along our sidewalk with a foreign lady who had Meryl Streep's nose and cheekbones. During the

silent walks with my wife, I imagined that I was taking up the same pattern that a great writer had begun in the not-too-distant past.

Within two minutes, I had put on my tennis shoes and bulky white cycling helmet. The helmet was especially important because I had always held the fear that while pedaling along deep in thought, I might run into a curb or pothole and thus get thrown head first onto the asphalt. (Such an accident might cause serious brain damage, which would have the tragic effect of imprisoning all of my powerful feelings and deep insights within my damaged cranium.) I took my red ten-speed out of the garage, wiped off some dust from the chrome handlebars, and took off.

By the fifth rotation of my pedal wheel, I had begun thinking again. I say “again” because Florence’s escape had liberated me from a mental struggle which had been paralyzing me at my desk that morning. I had been unable to concentrate hard enough on the story before me; instead, I was worrying about the fact that I had writer’s block in the first place. This concern led me to consider the causes of my artistic paralysis. My wife had been acting strangely: there were times when I caught her smiling to herself. She seemed to have grown tired of sympathizing with me in my fruitless attempts at getting published, and once she had even said, “Maybe it’s a sign that you should spend more time worrying about other things.” I had spent most of the morning wondering what she had meant by this, and, as a result, I was getting nowhere.

But, as I rode along looking for Florence, I realized that the old lady’s flight had provided me with a healthy distraction; I knew then (as I know now) that an unexpected interruption often jars the stops in a writer’s mind, and the jolt can set him to writing again. “Besides,” I thought, “I can exercise my imagination: I’ll put myself in Florence’s

place and anticipate her movements” The challenges of the task even excited me; to put oneself into the world of an elderly lady with Alzheimer’s, to feel her thoughts and think her feelings, this was the stuff of true writing.

My bike coasted across Main, a wide but quiet street lined on both sides with huge Dutch elms, and continued down the much narrower avenue which led back to our duplex. I continued on for two blocks while beige and white cottages with dark shutters and grey slate roofs rolled past on either side of me. Along the way, I counted three large cats lounging in separate sunny patches of sidewalk (I’ve never seen a neighborhood with so many cats — it was as if they had been imported to add color to the area’s flora and fauna), and it occurred to me that Florence’s bright red attire would stand out like a channel marker in the surrounding streets, where the clean whites of picket fences and the vivid greens of the small front yards predominated. Still, I knew that finding Florence could take some time; the neat rows of houses created a patchwork of backyards sewn together with ivy-covered fences and trim rows of hedges and bric-a-brac latticework — in short, there were a thousand lovely hiding places for an errant old lady to forget herself for the better part of a sunny morning. I also knew that in the past Florence had turned up in some very unexpected places: once she was found watching TV with a young boy in a stranger’s living room, and once, after she had been missing for nearly an hour, she was found weeding a bed of marigolds in the back of a house five blocks away from her own.

After I had passed three blocks, I stopped in the middle of the intersection and looked down the avenue which ran perpendicular to my street. At the far end of the street, which is dangerously close to a busy boulevard, I saw a figure in bright red

crouching by the side of the street. As I sped towards the red dot, I tried to think of the proper way to say "I've found her" in French (all good writers speak foreign languages) and, at the same time, I mentally rehearsed the clever, good-natured thing that I would say to Gump and the beautiful little blond girl once I had returned Florence to them. Several cute phrases went through my mind, but none of them chimed with enough originality. My lack of spontaneity quickly demoralized me, and I was further demoralized when the crouching figure in red steadily grew into a housewife who had stooped to pet a fat orange tabby lounging in the grass.

I turned my bike in the opposite direction, readjusted my bulky white cycling helmet, and told myself to concentrate harder. I was, after all, searching for an old woman, and I needed to think as an old woman. When I was even with my street, I looked down towards my house and saw Gump marching towards me; his bald head and glasses turned impatiently as he looked from side to side. "An old woman," I thought, "trapped in a house . . . her world an incoherent stream of memories and hazy images from the present" I then reached the next street, which ran parallel with ours, and saw the young girl traveling on a bike in the opposite direction; her blond hair swung with the furious motion of her pedaling. "A girl," I thought, "a young girl . . . people with Alzheimer's range far back into their past . . . I need to track down Florence the little girl." I then remembered the elementary school and playground which stood by the James River, and I shifted my gears so that my bike would speed me to this new destination. "This could be a story," I thought, "a young writer uses his imagination to connect with an old woman . . . he transcends the barriers of age and sex to save the day" I even envisioned the

image of an old lady in a swing flying through a patch of blue sky.

The avenue ended on James River Drive, and so I turned left and approached Hilton Elementary, an old-fashioned brick school with tall windows that revealed the ceilings of lonely classrooms desolated by the summer recess. I stopped riding and surveyed the deserted playground. I could see that no one walked along the bank of the wide shiny river which lay behind the school. The stillness of the scene drew out the melancholy that naturally pervades my writer's soul, and then the sound of a siren floated in from off of the water. I remembered that the day before a siren from the nearby fire station had intruded upon a silent dinner that I was having with my wife, and she smiled in a way that I hadn't seen in years. It was a secretive smile that disturbed me, so I asked her what she was thinking. "Oh, just about fire trucks," she said. "Big red fire trucks"

There was an edge to her voice that seemed to be meant for me. Irritated and confused, I murmured, "You complain that we never talk, but how can we talk when you're so obscure."

"Well said, Hemingway," she replied, and as the sound of the siren died away, she smiled once again and got up to wash the dishes.

The white glare that was reflected off of the river brought me back to the present, and I once again readjusted my cumbersome white cycling helmet and remembered that it was not the time to worry about my relationship with my wife; Florence was still out there, wandering, unwatched, and unbridled, and a glowing damsel in a short denim skirt and a deaf elderly man were still waiting in distress. I concentrated once again upon the artistic task of putting myself into Florence's world, and the thought that she might return to a place where she

could re-experience little-girlhood suddenly seemed too cute. "Perhaps," I thought, "she wants to be a young woman again . . ."

Estimating that Florence's age was about seventy years, I suddenly had a vision of her as a young flapper with a brunette bob, a black sleeveless dress, and a grey mink stole wrapped around her frail shoulders. I also considered that young women of all generations liked shopping, and I remembered that Silverman's Furs stood on the corner of the busy boulevard near our house. I had a vision of Florence gazing at the window display while humming something by Glen Miller. As I sped down Main Street, I realized that Florence's sentimental attraction to a mink would create an incongruence between her and her modern counterpart, who would most certainly condemn the wearing of mink as an act of cruelty to animals; "I'll use this in my piece to give it social and political relevance," I thought. "I could use Florence to symbolize an outdated mind set . . . cruelly bewildered by the flux of modern ideas . . ." I reached the boulevard within a minute, and, breathing heavily, I turned the corner only to find that the pavement in front of Silverman's Furs was as empty as the piece of paper that I had left on my writing desk not long before.

Tired and discouraged, I stopped and gazed at the display window of the fur store. A headless and armless mannequin with soft round hips and perfect breasts showed off a long black mink stole. It occurred to me that I didn't even know how my wife felt about minks or animals' rights or even something as trivial as sexist pronoun usage. Recently, we hardly ever spoke, but not long ago she had listened patiently as I complained about the hard life that an unappreciated writer leads. I felt a slight chafing of shame and regret, but I quickly shook these feelings off by looking down the bou-

levard to see if Florence was sitting on any of the shiny green benches that were positioned in front of a nearby bus stop. "My God," I thought. "What if she's taken the bus," but the fear instantly disappeared when a small red dot flashed in the corner of my eye.

I quickly turned my head to catch a full view of the red object, which was then transformed into a human figure disappearing through the screen door of the small brick fire station situated on the opposite corner of the intersection. "Of course!" I said aloud, and I smacked the top of my white cycling helmet. "What a perfect place for a crazy old lady to be . . . among the big red fire trucks with the bright gold lettering and hook ladders . . ." As I pedaled my bike across the boulevard, I thought about my wife and her curious thoughts about "big red fire trucks", and I guessed that she would laugh when I told her the story of Florence's flight to the fire station. "I could make the piece autobiographical," I thought, "... about how a writer's search for a missing elderly lady miraculously puts him back into touch with his estranged wife . . ." As I approached the sidewalk, however, a lanky fireman in a red t-shirt re-emerged from the screen door, and my hopes were shattered once again.

But I didn't give up. A large Methodist church stood next door to the fire station, and I realized that it was a natural place for an old woman with "traditional values" to visit. I walked my bike up to the front of the church and leaned it against one of the white columns which supported the church's high pediment. As I opened the door to the foyer, I remembered that a heroine in one of Styron's novels had drowned herself in the very river that I had visited that morning, and, for the first time that morning, I was forced to consider the possibility that the day's event might have a tragic ending.

I quietly opened the door to the sanctuary and beheld a couple kissing in one of the back pews. Although they had not noticed me, the man and woman ended their kiss and looked into each other's faces and laughed. I first noticed that the man, who was large and muscular, wore the dark blue fireman's uniform. I then noticed that the woman, who was smiling in a way that I hadn't seen in a long time and who I almost didn't recognize because of her happy expression — well, this woman was my wife.

Still unnoticed, I shut the sanctuary door as quietly as I had opened it. There was no need for a scene; I simply felt like too much of a fool to say anything. My writer's imagination had failed me in my search for Florence, and the mystery of what I had just witnessed had rendered me confused, weak, and hopeless. I should add, though, that my wife had chosen the safest meeting place for her lover's rendezvous: she knew that as an artist and an intellectual, I had little reason to wander into a church on a hot summer day.

When I returned home, I discovered that Florence had been found. The little blond girl had come upon the old lady in a nearby 7-11; Florence's hands and face were stained bright pink because she had been devouring "Atomic Fire Balls." Florence the young girl had eluded me, and Florence the young woman had disappointed me, but Florence the old woman had surprised me with her craving for something sweet, something spicy, something which no clever string of adjectives could ever describe. It had been a disappointing day, and I had plenty to complain about, but I returned to my study to face my nearly blank sheet of paper. After all, my writer's block had vanished.



Stairs #1 by Matthew Hulsman; Photograph.

Annie's Blue Hat

Curtis Walker

It was four a.m. Ethan Finley was sleeping, lying quietly on the left side of the bed, with his large wrinkled hands resting neatly on his folded back blankets. His white hair was unruffled. His night shirt was unwrinkled. Ethan did not toss and turn in his sleep. He picked one position and stuck with it.

Ethan woke up to the sound of the shattering glass and breaking wood. He flinched at the sound of something slamming into the sink in the corner. His favorite sink, his newest. But when he rose to investigate, he rose calmly. He carefully laid back the covers and walked into the hall. He peered cautiously into the living room, and then, picking up a heavy iron pipe from the floor, he stepped into the room.

There was no one there, of course. Just broken glass glimmering in the moonlight, and a chilly breeze blowing through the jagged hole in the window. He walked gingerly across the bare floor, trying to avoid the glass, to peer through the window.

The yard was dark and dangerous looking, with a lawn mower and two porcelain sinks, the only things poking up through the shaggy overgrown weeds. The moonlit street beyond was silent and empty. Jack's house across the street was dark.

Ethan turned away from the window to check the sink. He ran his hands over the smooth worn marble, but it seemed unharmed, although it was hard to tell for sure in the half light from the moon. He knelt to check the base, and there he found the rock.

It was a heavy rock, wrapped in a dirty piece of paper. He straightened up slowly and peeled off the paper, carefully smoothing it out. He held it up so he could read the words, written in large, threatening letters. It said, MOW YOUR LAWN.

Ethan went back to bed.

He woke again at seven, and brewed himself some coffee. Then he dressed himself carefully, in grey pants, a pinstriped shirt, and a bow tie, and went out on the

porch. This was his morning ritual. And this morning, Jack across the street was waiting. Standing at attention behind his lawn mower, he waited until Ethan opened his front door, and then, looking pointedly in Ethan's direction, he jerked the starter cord, and the lawn mower roared into action.

Ethan watched impassively as Jack pushed the mower back and forth across the lawn, neatly cornering around the rose bushes, easing the mower alongside the hedge.

When he was done, he carefully raked up the clippings, and then stalked off to the house.

Ethan was slow to finish his coffee. His own lawn mower stood rusting right where he had left it, in the middle of the yard.

When he had finished the last sip of cold coffee, he went inside, rinsing his coffee cup at the sink by the door, and drying it off with a clean towel. Then he set about fixing the broken window. Sweeping the shards of glass into a little pile, he wondered how to patch the window. He didn't have any glass. Perhaps he had some plywood. He could just board up the window. But then the picture of his house all boarded up, the front room dark as a hole, loomed up in his mind. He could almost feel the black emptiness closing in on him already.

Maybe plywood wasn't such a good idea. He emptied the broken glass into a garbage can, and sat down on the floor to think. In the end he just left the window as it was.

He found himself in the backyard, tinkering with a few old sinks. They had come from an elementary school, and he loved their tiny white porcelain bodies. They were identical, except for a chipped corner on one. They were supported by slim white pedestals, with squarish basins and tiny faucet handles. He spent the morning laying the pipes for them, connecting them with the main line from the house.

He wanted to rig them up as birdbaths. There were dozens of sinks in the backyard,

but only five or six of them had running water. He kept the rest in a pile near the back of the lot. Last weekend, he had caught birds playing in them after the rain. He had raced into the backyard, waving his arms and shouting at them. They all flew away, but soon they were back. He pleaded with them, to leave his sinks alone, but they didn't seem to understand. He spent the next morning outside with a can of Comet, scrubbing away birdshit. He decided to set up a couple of sinks just for the birds, and then they would leave the rest of his sinks alone.

So he decided to set up two twin birdbaths, in a nice sunny spot, filled daily with fresh tap water.

"These are for you," he told the birds as he made the final connections to the slender pipes under the two sinks.

"So just leave the others alone," he said sternly, as he shifted them into position, in a sunny spot right behind the house. He went down to the back of the lot to turn the water main back on, and then walked slowly back up to fill the twin birdbaths with cool fresh tap water. He only hoped the birds would understand.

The afternoon found Ethan back on the front porch, watching Jack busily trimming the hedge. Jack had always kept a neat yard, but ever since his wife had died six years ago, he had spent more and more time in the yard, pulling weeds and moving plants, tending Ella's herb garden. Ethan, also, had spent his afternoons tending his yard, and they would sit together in the evenings, chatting and admiring their work. Annie always sat out on the front porch, watching them. Those had been pleasant times, and the two old men had grown close. They would walk through the neighborhood together, sometimes barely talking, just a casual word here and there. "I've been thinking of building a grape arbor."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, out behind the oak tree."

They understood each other. So Jack had been friendly at first, last fall, when Ethan suddenly stopped cutting his grass. The grass grabbed hold of Ethan's yard; hearty weeds hoisted up a million green flags, claiming the land as theirs. They sent their roots deep into the soil, defying him to

remove them. But Ethan hardly noticed. He had given up the fight.

Jack would make good-natured jokes when Ethan stopped by in the evening; "Ease up on the fertilizer, there, buddy; it's growing so fast you can't keep up with it." And then a week later, "Careful, Ethan; if you get lost in that yard, we'll never find you." Every few days, he would say something. "So, when you going to cut down that jungle, heh, heh." Finally Ethan stopped walking by.

Then winter came, and the grass stopped growing. It didn't die, but it was at least tamed by the cold wind and the dim sunlight of winter. So the grass dug in, set up camp for the winter, determined to keep a toehold. Jack still grumbled, but tried to keep it to himself. And Ethan spent the winter fixing the bathroom sink.

The bathroom sink was his first sink; he bought it to replace the one he had smashed to pieces with an eight pound maul.

It was a beauty, with just one single knob, which summoned forth hot or cold water depending on how you moved it. It was very modern, and for weeks he never tired of playing with it; hot, cold, fast, slow; it was wonderful. He found the smooth rush of the water comforting. He washed his hands over and over, letting the water flood through the wrinkles in his palms. And when he turned it off, not a single drip.

Soon he started tinkering with the pipes, and before he knew it, he had hooked up a second sink, out in the hall, with pipes running in from the bathroom. At first, he lost pressure when he had both sinks running at once, but he soon fixed that.

Ethan found the hall sink to be a comforting presence in the empty house, and he began hunting around, going to auctions, looking for good sinks.

As he accumulated more and more sinks, they began to spill out into the yard. Jack, of course, had a few words to say about that. Ethan ignored him, hooking up two kitchen sinks next to the mailbox.

Then spring came, and Jack became vicious. Ethan's yard grew completely out of control, even showing its way up through the sidewalk. The cement broke and crumbled, but Ethan had too much to do maintaining his sinks to take the time to

worry with the yard. He was through cutting grass.

He had cut the grass for forty-seven years, once a week. He had watered it in the summer, raked leaves in the fall, and carefully tended the young green shoots of spring. But he had been wasting his time. He saw that now; he understood that now. He had made a terrible mistake.

It was dark now. The crickets were chirping, and the street lamp was flickering to life. Ethan pushed himself up from his chair on the porch and went inside to wash up for bed. He used the hall sink. He hung up his pants, put his shirt in the laundry, and laid his bow tie on the bureau. He had one glass of water from the bedroom sink and then folded back the covers and climbed into bed.

The next day was the same. He woke at seven, had coffee on the porch while Jack ostentatiously weeded his flower beds. When Ethan rose to go inside, Jack leaped to his feet in anger, flung down his trowel, and shouted, "Mow your fucking lawn, you son of a bitch!"

But Ethan was already thinking of some brass pipes he had salvaged for an antique sink. He spent the rest of the week installing the sink in the kitchen, right next to the water fountain from the old city hall. He scrubbed it out and shined it up, and then drilled holes in the floor for the pipes. He spent one whole day just polishing the brass, and then the next day he finally hooked it up. Then he fitted the faucet with new washers and excitedly tried it out. He was standing there reveling in the beautiful rush of water when he heard the knock at the door.

It was a policeman. A fat guy, with a mustache that didn't quite suit him.

"What can I do for you?" Ethan asked politely, holding the screen door halfway open.

"Well, we've had several complaints, Mr. Finley," the policeman said, "and I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to mow your lawn."

"There must be some mistake," Ethan said pleadingly.

"No mistake, sir," the cop said. "City ordinance 4297; you mow your lawn or we slap you with a 500 dollar fine and up to six

weeks in jail."

Ethan gazed past the policeman at the lawn mower standing neglected in the weeds. Then he noticed Jack watching from across the street. He turned away without a word and went to the sink in the corner, where he began washing his hands.

The policeman followed him inside. "Mr. Finley," he said in a warning tone, "I'm here to make sure you cut your grass. I suggest you cooperate."

Ethan didn't respond. He was concentrating on the soothing water coursing over his fingers. The cop strode across the room and grabbed him by the shoulder. "Come on, Mr. Finley; it's time to mow your lawn." He tried to pull the old man away from the sink, but Ethan wheeled around sharply, jabbing his elbow into the guy's face. The policeman cried out and pulled back sharply, and Ethan, moving swiftly in on him, pressed him over backwards against the sink in the center of the room.

"I was just washing my hands," he hissed in the cop's face, and then turned back to the corner sink.

"That's it, mister; you're gonna cut that fucking grass," the policeman said grimly as he grabbed Ethan by both arms and shoved him roughly toward the door, wiping angrily at the blood on his lip.

As they appeared on the front porch, Jack yelled approvingly.

"It's about time he cut it," he shouted. "Goddamn snakes and rats and who knows what else living in that yard." The policeman didn't respond as he pushed Ethan down the steps toward the lawn mower.

"Are you sure there's a law about this?" Ethan asked quietly. "I think she might be coming back. I can't let her see me doing this. Cutting the grass again." He was almost pleading, in a barely audible whisper.

"Who's coming back?" said the cop.

"Annie," said Ethan. He was standing in front of the lawn mower now. "She didn't like it."

"Who's Annie?" the policeman asked.

But Ethan didn't answer.

"Cut the grass, goddammit! That's all we want," Jack shouted from across the street. But Ethan just stood there. The cop grabbed Ethan's hands and wrapped them around the handle. But as soon as he let

go, Ethan's hands fell back by his sides.

"Hey, give me a hand, here," the cop called to Jack, fighting against Ethan's silent resistance.

"Start it up," he said when Jack had arrived.

All of a sudden Ethan stopped fighting. He couldn't move. He had been standing right here, last August, when Annie had come out of the house. Wearing her pretty blue hat. Her hat for special occasions. She had walked across the well-groomed grass and touched his hand. She had leaned close to be heard over the mower and said, "Goodbye, Ethan."

That was all she had said. But somehow the way she said it drained out all of his energy. He stood there, with the mower running, and watched her drive off down the street. He stood there for about ten minutes, and then absently flipped off the mower and went inside. She had left a note on the kitchen table.

All it said was, "Goodbye."

That was all she said, but he knew she meant it, because she had said it twice.

And he stood in the kitchen, in the silence of the empty house, wondering what he had done wrong. Wondering what, after forty-seven years, could make his wife leave him. That was when he heard it. The drip, drip of the bathroom sink. He had never noticed it before. How long had it been dripping? Maybe forty seven years? She had been waiting all this time for him to fix that sink, and finally she had gotten tired of waiting. Hadn't she mentioned it once, last week? Or maybe twice?

That was when he took the eight pound maul to the sink, smashing it until it stopped dripping, until the pipes lay broken and twisted, and he curled up and cried on the floor.

Jack was trying eagerly to get the mower started, but the rusty motor wouldn't turn over. "It's time to cut the grass, Ethan," he was humming to himself. He paused, letting go of the pull cord. He looked up at the old man standing, dazed, in front of the mower. "She's not coming back, Ethan," he said harshly. "You know that. She left you; now get over it." There was a mean note in his voice.

Ethan stiffened. He grabbed fiercely onto the handle of the lawn mower and yanked the machine up off the ground. But the mower was so rusty that the motor fell away from the body, leaving him holding the empty frame, which he swung with all his strength at Jack's head. Jack didn't have time to duck. The mower caught him in the temple, the rusty metal ripping it open. He screamed as he collapsed in the tall grass, clutching his head. Ethan simply stood there, holding the mangled lawn mower. The policeman ripped off his shirt and knelt down to try and stop the blood, but the starched material was too stiff to do much good. So he threw it aside, desperately yanking off his t-shirt.

Ethan set down the mower and slowly bent down to pick up the police shirt. There was a big red label inside the collar. It said "Freddy's Costume Shop."

He looked back at the bare-chested man holding Jack's head in his hands. The mustache was falling off his face.

He was crying and babbling, "Please don't die, Uncle Jack, please don't die." But the shirt was already soaked with blood, and there was plenty more spilling out around his fingers. "Can you hear me, Jack?" he said desperately. "I never should have helped you with this. The guy's a fucking maniac. Why does it matter if the guy cuts his grass or not?"

Then Jack lifted his head, slowly, weakly. He opened his eyes. "It matters." Those were the last words he said.

Ethan had his back turned. He was scrubbing his hands furiously at the sink in the front yard, concentrating on the sound of the water, the smooth flow of suds down the drain. But all the suds could not clean his mind of the image of Jack's wide-open skull. And even after all this time, the running water could never quite wash away the picture of Annie, driving off down the road in her pretty blue hat.



Untitled 1-5 by Monika Rief; Photograph.





Giant Stick Insect by Brian Fricks; Oil on paper.



The Dumpster by Erik Strom; Oil on canvas.



Room 2 by Curtis Walker; Oil on paper.



Untitled by Helen Smith; Oil on paper.



Rough Wake, Ferry-Nova Scotia by A. Doren; Color Photograph.



Twilight Sleep I by Kathleen Ward; Acrylic on Paper.



Water's Edge by Kathleen Ward; Acrylic on Paper.



Ali by Maral Arslanian; Photograph.



Untitled by Graham Davis; Photograph.

Dear Alix, (maybe)
Charles M. Turner III

She thinks like you do
thinks, I'll grow up, raise a family
job first, join a civic club,
maybe plant trees with the rose gardeners
in some small town,
but she has no idea where.
She has big plans for today

She watches us walk by.
She watches,
gets goose bumps when you talk
thinks about how many times you've cried
in your life. She reads you
pretending to be invisible.
She wakes up and hopes
you don't. She wants you to lie there
so she can look at your neck
touch the tips of your fingers
whisper in your left ear as I have.

She is the one who writes you letters
that start off Dear Alix, Maybe-
She takes them to the post but always forgets
the stamp. As it falls, she waits
hopes the postmaster will catch her in time to say,
"Ma'am, you've forgotten the stamp again."
But she keeps walking,
smiles when she thinks
and waits for you to answer.



Untitled; Collage.



Untitled; Collage.



Ubu Plays Squares; Collage.

Martin Bland



Brumal by John McIntyre; Watercolor.



Untitled by Amy Zimmerman; Oil on canvas.



January 1996 I; Oil on paper.

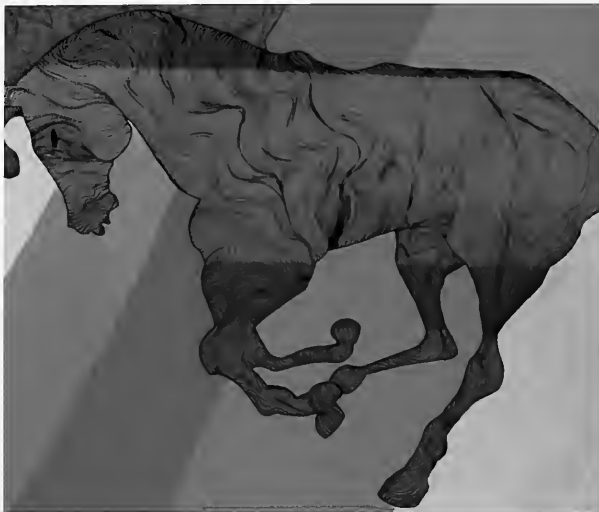


March 1996 III; Oil on board.



February 1996 I; Oil on paper.

Margie Stewart



Horse by Adam Reese; Paint/Marker.



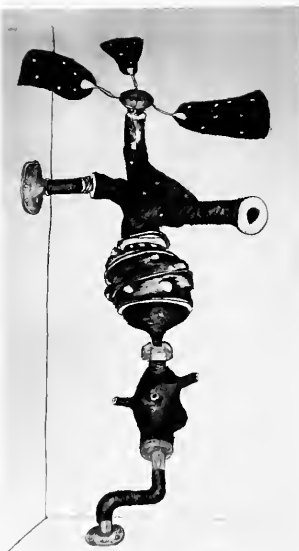
Untitled by Page Collins; Collage.



Untitled by Charlotte Chipman; Watercolor.



Self Portrait V by Terina Potts; Oil on canvas.



Untitled by Jane South; Charcoal
on paper



Untitled; Charcoal on paper.



Untitled by Jane South; Plaster and Graphite.



Soulmates by Robert Labranche; Oil on Canvas.



Butterfly; Oil on canvas.



Self-Portrait by Robert Labranche; Mixed Media on canvas.



Expulsion; Mixed Media on canvas.

How to Make an Asshole

Alison Fields

"You shouldn't worry about me, I'm just playing the tragic figure," I say, leaving Anthony's house at exactly quarter past seven.

He rolls his eyes. "I would be terribly disappointed if you weren't," he says, tapping his feet on the concrete sidewalk in front of his building. "You're my last friend who still favors melodrama. I get so tired of all this understated nonsense that Eric and Joel and all of them seem to prefer. The way they pout around when they come to dinner, never really saying what's on their minds, never really saying much of anything of any importance really."

I flail my arms under the streetlight, dropping light on the yellowish grassy fragments in front of the house next door. I have a sudden inclination to sit there on the sidewalk and attempt to bathe myself in the fluorescent light, but judging from Anthony's neighbors, who peer out at us now with sneaky glares, I would probably be arrested.

"I am not Eric or Joel or Annie or any of the rest of them. I have a status of self-declared, miserable human being to uphold, why cage my misery, I'm so good at showing it off. Oh, but to die would be a gift now, I pray for my death every night, Anthony dear."

"You'd never off yourself, Julia, you're too conceited."

I sigh. "True, but it's certainly fun to think about, as for the aforementioned, they're all assholes, and Annie, she's just trying too hard. I think she

read in *Cosmo* last month that sullen was sexy or something. I don't know what to say."

"Goodbye?" asks Anthony.

I punch his arm slightly. "Are you trying to rush me off?"

"I want to run before it gets too dark."

I look at the sky fading rapidly in cooler hues. "It's pretty dark now."

"Exactly," says he, inspecting for a moment the ketchup stain on his "Kiss me I'm Irish" t-shirt that he bought for some unknown reason one night from this vendor on Charles Street, who had set up a trailer in front of the Stab and Grab. Eric and I had run into him after being rained on to the point of exhaustion, and cowered under his umbrella for a while. Anthony always had an umbrella, because he said the rain made his hair too kinky.

I remember how that night Anthony tried to pick up a little Caucasian exchange student (apparently, he later said, from Ireland) in front of the Java Hut. Some words were exchanged and when Eric and I walked up, Anthony was watching the fair-haired youth saunter away on the arm of a white girl. Perhaps the t-shirt was a kind of dedication to the effort. Still, Eric made fun of him for the shirt for weeks after the purchase. A large, petulant and prissy black man in the shamrock bedecked shirt was a bit of a novelty for a while, in this town, where things are only novelties for so long before they become cliché.

This was back when Eric poked fun at friends without any malicious intent.

Before, before...

"Besides," says Anthony, "I want to shower before Roy comes over."

Before I broke his heart.

I clear my throat and checked my watch. "Oh, well, okay then, I guess I'll go. I told Meg I'd meet her at eight anyway."

Anthony gives me the thumbs up. "I'm so jealous."

"Oh she's not that bad, and besides she'll pay for dinner without thinking about it."

"I see we're not above mooching off friends anymore," he says.

I laugh. "Not in these troubled times, my friend."

Anthony starts jogging in place, his crisp-looking running shoes slapping the pavement rhythmically.

I sense it is time for my departure.

"Are you going to Sam's later?" he asks.

"Probably, if I don't kill myself first."

He waves me aside. "Goodbye, Julia."

"See ya."

I walk to my car and notice the sky is now completely dark and it looks like it might rain.

Anthony has neglected to take his umbrella on his jog.

Recently I have had some problems starting my car and I always hope for a split second when I get into the driver's seat that everything will not suddenly die completely. My car is on its last leg anyway, 160,000 miles and counting. Eric and I, with our combined effort, in a little less than three years

put a hundred thousand miles on the odometer. Volvo behemoth that it is, the rear space is ideal for hauling all kinds of equipment and luggage, and Eric had to travel a lot, so we would call out for ten minute advance warning road trips, one of which took us all the three thousand miles to the west coast where we once considered settling, but after a few tepid weeks consisting of lukewarm coffee, one nice hotel, an afternoon feud in Golden Gate park, resulting from Eric's rather didactic speech on popular culture in the bay area while I was attempting to justify my sudden craving for shrimp and grits and a few non-politically correct sexual acts, lumpy uncomfortable half-sleep on the sofas of a few stoner friends of Eric's who had migrated West back when I was still in high school, and the final indignity of having a lit cigarette removed from my lips by a smirking high school boy with an "allergy" to smoke.

Actually it was 2500 miles or so, but I suppose that isn't terribly important.

The car broke down three times on the way. Something with the valves that Eric was able to fix with certain ingenious devices made with duct tape, beer cans, funnels and one dead AA battery.

The car broke down once on the way back, somewhere in the general vicinity of Tulsa, and the situation demanded parts that could not and should not be homemade. I wrote a bad check for \$368.00 and borrowed enough money from Anthony when I got back home to cover the cost before the check bounced.

My car actually starts tonight and glides out onto the road as if under the delusion that it is aerodynamic and in perfect condition. Maybe I'm hallucinat-

ing right now, but this town actually looks real pretty tonight. It's September now, and it's still hot, but at least the trees are turning around the edges and the sky is taking on fall colors. It occurs to me that the residents here on Faber Street probably have the best view in town, that of the giant digital clock atop the Citizens National Bank Building, newly revamped complete with monstrous green tinted parking garage, replacing the old concrete parking deck, where I used to park my car before I felt so old hanging out downtown.

From the top of the old parking deck the city was set out like pop-up pictures, and it almost looked pretty. I was eighteen when I first drove my car, newly christened from sex with a forgettable frat boy, up the cracked ramp to the top where I almost ran over a shy boy named Eric with a surreptitious smile and a kind of innocence about him that seemed highly unnatural for a boy of nineteen.

While I parked the car that night, he drunkenly sauntered opposite from my car to relieve himself against one graffiti-ed wall. Sometime later that same evening I found myself on his lap heading for some unknown location in the countryside, to the house of a certain Jones Henry, beguiled by the casual remarks about a "kind-of, sort-of party" and how when Eric laughed, his left eyebrow arched upward like an arrow. He had a way of nonchalantly slipping his hand between my fingers and instructing my whole body to tremble with a careless touch.

I honk the horn when I pass Anthony and scare him half to death, his hands fluttering around his chest as if

feigning a heart attack, and laugh as I watch him lumbering toward the park, his big feet making diminutive steps over the sidewalk. One day, I swear to God, poor Anthony will take a spill across the pavement, tripping over his brilliant white Nike's while trying to perfect that girlie step he tries to attempt while running.

I will be beside myself with laughter and will not be able to control myself.

Most likely, I will be driving when I see this happening and wreck the car against the lamppost and total chaos will ensue.

I laugh now just thinking about it all.

I'm meeting Meg at Laney's for dinner and I have just missed my turn.

Recently I've tried to bypass downtown as much as possible, preferring instead the social life found toward the north end of the college strip where there are not so many obnoxious pizza parlors and bars and coffee shops filled to the point of claustrophobia with all the artsy types, and punks, and poseurs and frat boys and hippies and little technoheads in form fitting t-shirts and political types and anarchists and neo-beatniks and debutantes that all college towns seem to spawn. This one is no exception. The north end is more sedate, a little older, not quite so devastatingly hip as to induce and fashion inspired seizure. This is where we all hang out nowadays. Now that we can all legally buy drinks at Sam's, now that we can all pretend to afford Laney's, we've stopped slumming it, so to speak.

Last week I lost my PR job. Working public relations at an ad agency. The president of the agency had disliked me

immediately from day one when I walked in wearing rhinestones and black leather with my otherwise conservative work uniform of silk-looking blouse and long straight skirt. When Jill, the president, finally took me into her office and told me that she thought I would be better off working someplace else, I felt a sense of relief, because I would have never had the nerve to quit even though the job itself was making me miserable. I thought about telling her that my career advisor at college had sent me there after I had clearly stated that I wanted to be a novelist, not a businesswoman. And I thought about telling her that my friends and I used to speak of things in initials all the time as a kind of secret code, and that in my world PR stood for something entirely different. And I thought about telling her that her suit was awful and her hair was the pits. And I thought about asking her if she was really very happy in her life, I imagined my questions and insights intriguing Jill, and her calling me up for weeks afterward and inviting me for coffee and dessert at her house and us talking about men, and her asking me questions about why her life was so miserable.

Eric could have told her in great detail. He and I used to drive through the business district downtown on the way to afternoon class for me or work for him and he would fantasize about abducting one of those high gloss, starched and pressed businessmen, bustling through the streets, and taking them somewhere and giving them some kind of socio-cultural lesson, which would culminate in their realization of why they were miserable in their upper end jobs and their six figure salary.

I always tried to defend these men, always tried to remind Eric that maybe they weren't all bad, that they believed in what they were doing, but he wouldn't ever listen, and soon we would forget the whole conversation, and Eric would start tickling me and honking my horn, and I would love him completely.

I'd drop him off at work on the way to English class, at this little cafe where he worked and would take my hand and squeeze it gently.

"I love you," he'd say, and smile.

And I would laugh and mutter a return and never really think that I meant it.

The irony is, here I am broke and unemployed, and me wanting to avoid the corporate world, stereotyping my friends who have already relegated themselves to climate controlled offices and three piece suits.

When I got fired, I threw out my pumps.

Laney's is that vaguely upscale restaurant in any town where the food is mediocre at best, but the bar is impressive and the decor is tres chic. It was Meg's favorite restaurant in the world, just behind the Oak Room, which she would always remind us was where she had her sixteenth birthday in high style with five courses followed by an evening out on the town after which she retreated to her Plaza suite.

We all know she is lying, but no one can really correct Meg, because it all seems so real to her. This epic, fabricated existence she uses to cover up the fact that her real life is just boring. When I first met Meg she was coming out of Laura Ashley in tears on the strip, and she proceeded to nearly run me over

in her sadness, and we both fell down on the concrete and I made the grave error of asking if she was all right.

That was four years ago, and ever since then Meg has been a constant character in my life, following Eric and Anthony and I around and telling us that all she wanted to do was spend the rest of her days in our company. All four of us in some apartment in New York sounded like utopia, even though to what Meg professed to be in, characters like Eric seemed highly unusual roaming the strip with her at night.

She always told him she wanted to be his little sister, that he was the most wonderful person she had ever met.

I always laughed at this, because when you spend everyday with a demigod, it's hard to get the perspective you need to realize that person really is a divine creature.

Meg has gotten us a table in the smoking section, for my benefit.

She waves when I approach. "Julia, is it true that you've also joined the ranks of the unemployed?"

I slide into my chair opposite her and take the menu from the waiter. "Yes, I'm afraid so. It seems my time in the employment of the Crestwood Agency has come to a sudden halt."

"Oh sweetheart, I'm so sorry."

"I'm not," I say. "It wasn't really for me anyway."

Meg has a sip of her drink, some horrific fruity beverage somehow involving coconut milk and peach Schnapps among other things. "I know how you feel."

I laugh because Meg is on her fourth job in three months, selling evening gowns at Thalhimers. Ever

since she received her trust fund last year the idea of a consistent job seems ridiculous to her.

"Can you imagine now what a horrible time I've had of it all?" she asks.

I nod. "I guess so, but as I said, I really can't be too upset by it, except for the fact that I don't know what I'll do now and my expenses are not decreasing at all. I suppose I can always go back to waiting tables at Chrysanthemum in desperation."

Meg nodded looking down into her drink, the cherry and pineapple bedecked toothpick. "Annie's got your old job there. I saw her there today."

I try to laugh again but it comes out me like a melancholy hiccup. "My old job and my old boyfriend, if imitation is the highest form of flattery...."

"Yeah, Eric's working there too. He's such an asshole these days."

"So I've heard," I say.

Meg takes my hand as I lift a cigarette to my lips. "See Julia, he would have just turned raging asshole on you eventually. You're probably better off...."

She doesn't finish her train of thought for which I am terribly grateful. Meg knows as well as I do that if he is an asshole now, it is mostly my fault.

I think of how everyone used to love Eric. That random people I didn't even know would approach me and tell me how jealous they were that he was mine.

And he was truly mine in every sense and we worshipped each other.

I remember sitting one night in Laney's after paying the bill for me and Eric, who could never afford to pay for anything, playing cards as the waiters and waitresses stepped around our table, giving us the evil eye, and Eric

smiling away at everyone as they walked past, flipping down his cards cheerfully losing every single time and me telling him about the night when I was seventeen and decided that I should be a singer for a rock and roll band, hopping a train for New York and serving pizza for six weeks, living with some distant cousin in Brooklyn, before deciding the lifestyle was not for me.

"Why?" he asked, shuffling through his hand, stealing one of my cigarettes.

"I guess I got tired of being cold and lonely at night, of not having ecstatic fans moving wildly as I screamed my heart out on the stage of that one little club where they were stupid enough to let the band play." I considered this and took another sip of coffee. "I dunno. I guess I just wasn't devoted enough or something."

Eric laughed. "That description sounds like my whole life."

"Different strokes," I said, leaning over to him, running my fingers over his arm on the table from elbow to fingertips. "Besides, I will instead impress the world with my literary greatness. I am my own ecstatic fan I suppose."

"No," he said. "I'm totally devoted to you, regardless of your respective greatness. I think you're wonderful."

Statements like these always took me off guard. I think I just looked astonished for five minutes completely silent while he played his card. I forgot to think about how trite he sounded, how cliché. "Right back to you, kid," I said, finally, dropping an ace of spades on the stack and slapping my hand down lightly. "Gin."

Meg stares at me. "Dahling, do you want a drink?"

The waiter is standing over my shoulder, his pimply cheek shining under the neon lights, tapping his pen on the pad.

"Yeah." I clear my throat. "Vodka and tonic."

He writes it down and moves away impatiently.

"He didn't check my ID," I say.

"Does that bother you?" asks Meg, carefully checking the corners of her mouth with her left ring finger.

"I guess not. Just makes me feel old, you know." I stare at my purse on the floor, my hand on the table top, the watch at my wrist. I never used to wear watches.

"Jesus, you and Anthony, that's all you talk about, getting old. How dull, I'm twenty-three, I still feel fine. It's not like you're approaching middle age. Dear, it's hip to be a twenty-something, don't you know that?"

"I think I read that somewhere." I laugh. "Meg, I've been thirty-six since I was four, and only now do I realize how much I missed. Here I am an adult, the same kid who used to sit on my Mom's bed and cry when she was dressing for some cocktail party or other social function, because I wasn't old enough to live that life, to be the old movie star in the black gloves and the evening gown, and all I want now is to be seventeen again."

Meg shakes her head. "You are never happy, you know that?"

"I was happy..." I exhale my curlie-cue smoke, so it shows up in the lights.

"You mean, with Eric."

"Of course I mean with Eric." My hand hits the table. The waiter brings my drink.

"You are so difficult, you know?" Meg looks at the waiter. "I'll have a

Greek salad and a cup of Black Bean soup."

I know those pimples on the waiter are staring right at me, each little blackhead probing into my brain. Meg is tossing her hair impatiently, sighing, twiddling thumbs, even though my head is in my hands, I examine my palms up close and personal.

"Julia?"

I scratch my eyebrow, take a sip of my drink, consider lighting another cigarette, "Asparagus and Walnut Penne, Cæsar salad."

Acne waiter struts away, nose cocked upward.

"That waiter is an asshole," I say.

She stirs her frothy fruity beverage before sipping. "I suspect that you are not the easiest customer he's had today."

"Fuck him, Meg. I used to wait tables. There is cockiness, there is indifference and then there is full-on asshole behavior."

"What flipped your switch tonight?"

Sometimes Meg utters the most fruity phrases that I cannot control my laughter. "That was the silliest cliché I've ever heard."

She stares away.

I continue laughing, laughing, getting my laughs caught in the back of my throat, like that day when Eric discovered me and Joel at Meg's house, laying flat across her bed, his hand resting on my stomach and I laughed.

And Eric had walked into her kitchen.

And I had followed, into the slant rays gliding across the tile, picking up the details of leftover crumbs and dead ants.

"This can't go on," he said.

I reached to touch his cheek.

"What are you talking about?"

"I can't live like this, Julia. I've met somebody else, you've met somebody..."

Joel walked by the kitchen door, waving as he crossed the threshold stepping into the hallway.

"Eric...."

He raised a hand, band-aid on thumb, ink spot on wrist. "No, no. Just answer me one question...did it really become that boring for you?"

"It was never..."

"Did it? It's been three years." He sighed. "Yes I've been gone for five months, but did you need someone that badly?"

My lip started quivering.

"Don't do that," he said.

"Eric, I love you."

He took my arm. "I love you too, I...I just don't want to be hurt anymore."

We retreated to Meg's fire escape, holding each other for hours, crying, staring at the fake metropolitan skyline, watching the digital minute on the clock go by, before Anthony and Meg came back and we tried to eat dinner together. We ate pasta and Cæsar salad.

"We missed you last Thursday," Meg says scraping her hand against the tabletop.

I smile halfway. "Who came to dinner?"

"Me and Anthony, Eric and Anne, Roy, you know the whole crowd."

Thursday was designated dinner night. Everyone comes and gets wildly drunk while Anthony tries to prepare some outrageous dish, that attempts to satisfy everyone's dietary restrictions.

"You know I don't go anywhere

when I know Annie's going to be there."

Meg raises her eyebrows. "What a mature line of thinking, Julia."

I glare. "Let's not talk about it." Take a sip of drink. "Anthony says Joel's been hanging out over there recently." Silence.

"Yes?" I stir my drink again, just for the hell of it. "You were saying?"

"Fine, yes. Joel's been hanging out at Anthony's too. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

I love it when Meg gets flustered, her nose twitches all around, and her eyes roll all around.

"In a matter of speaking...."

"Poor Joel." She sighs.

She is goading me to say something.

I contemplate being insulting.

"Yes, poor Joel," I say, thinking about Joel in my arms telling me that he was still a virgin.

Eric had been acting odd for weeks, after I got back from Meg's and my super Europe trip, when I met Joel outside a club that night, looking for Eric, wanting Eric, needing Eric, but just telling myself over and over again that it wasn't important that it would always be there.

Joel was a quick fuck, anxious, innocent, a little seventeen year old boy that I, at twenty-one, had never thought I would have again.

"Do you care that I'm not a virgin?" I had asked him.

"No."

I remember how when we first made love, as we had gone along, Joel got better at the act itself kissing closer and closer to the way that Eric kissed.

Joel was my minion. Joel was my worshipper. Joel was my reminder of

what it was like to not care what you are going to be doing in exactly a year and a half. Joel was my revenge.

"Are you trying to hurt me deliberately?" Eric asked.

"No," I said. "No... I just know...."

Eric sighed. "It is over. Now it's just time for me to realize that."

I told Joel that he was my salvation and that I would never leave him feeling like I'd left others feeling.

A week later when I had finally expelled Joel from my bed, I passed him driving back from Anthony's and he didn't even wave.

Joel lost his charm as soon as I realized exactly what his charms had caused me to lose.

My pasta is awfully good, even though I don't particularly like the nuts.

"...so then I told that awful woman that the dress made her look like a breathless Pekinese, and she left in a huff. She was such a yodel."

"A what?" I am laughing.

"A yodel, you know, like a bumpkin, but worse. The kind of woman who would not know high fashion if it bit her on the ankle." Meg is staring at me thoughtfully. "I don't think you've listened to a word I've said all night."

"That's not true. I heard you say 'yodel' didn't I?"

She sighs. "You know what I mean."

I shake my head. "I'm sorry I just have a lot on my mind."

"Don't worry about the job it will all work itself out, darling."

"It's definitely not the job I'm thinking about." I light a cigarette, my pasta has officially been neglected. "Did you know that Eric and I talked for the first time in two years the other night?"

Meg rolls her eyes. "I sense this is turning into a romantic conversation. Was it awful?"

"No...no, not at all really. We were both drunk and I didn't know that he was staying with Anthony, something about his lease running out and he and Annie getting a place of their own. I just was passed out on Anthony's floor and he walked in and he laid down on the couch and we talked about our present situations. I suppose it felt good to talk to him."

Meg picks up a piece of parsley and nibbles at the edges, another odd habit of hers. She always eats the garnishes. "Was he being an asshole?"

"No, he was being very sweet. It was just good. No resolutions mind you. Just good." I tilt my head up to watch the ceiling and the lights.

She nods. "I'm glad. I've been worried about you guys for years now."

Continued munching of parsley.
Silence.

Meg doesn't really care to know anymore so I don't tell her that he was the one who still wanted to talk more. That he was the one who kept asking if I was still awake even though he should have known better. It was only when I started crying and I couldn't stop that he grew uncomfortable.

"Please stop," he said from the floor, from the darkness of Anthony's downstairs.

"I can't." My cheeks were wet, my body was trembling too hard, my cheek kept rubbing against the carpet, I felt my face turning red.

"You have to. Please, Julia, stop. I can't handle it."

All I remember then was him giving up and going upstairs, and leaving

the next morning after feigning sleep when Annie entered, in her typically brash manner, outraged at my presence, not even looking at me when she walked into the living room, calling for Eric.

Annie, looking trim and perky, as if headed off to some kind of satanic aerobics class at that place in the mall.

"Maybe Annie's good for him, Julia," Meg says. "Do you want dessert?"

I laugh. "I left Eric numb, Annie made him coarse. I guess it serves me right. He needed something to fall back on. Eric never really was that strong."

"That's a good line." Meg chews on a crust. "I left him numb, she made him callous."

"Yeah?" I say.

"Uh-huh."

"Well, feel free to quote me. I don't think I'll ever use it myself."

I stare into my plate, thinking of that morning after Annie when Eric finally walked down the stairs passing me, avoiding my eyes and nodding in my direction as he stepped out the door. He walked out of my life again and no matter how many times I pass his car in the parking lot of that idiot restaurant, the same one where I dropped him everyday, where he always got his job back, I never stop like I did before to ask him when he'd be home or any other pointless ridiculous question that plagued me, and no matter where I'm going it's always on the way.

Meg pays the check while I wander the bathroom and stare at myself in the mirror taking inventory of every possible imperfection. There are plenty. Sigh.

I think I'm going to write an instruction manual for wrecking the lives

of wonderful, beautiful, seemingly perfect, relationships. Eric used to say that I could give senseless directions to anything. Long complex self-help style analyses of points so simple as to need no explanation at all.

Funny, I'd say, that sounds almost practical. I'm sure you wouldn't want to confuse any of my actions with practicality. I thought I was the most unrealistic person you knew.

I laugh at myself in the mirror and the lady at the towel dispenser readjusts her rhinestone lizard pin and walks out glaring at me.

Meg is tapping her fingers noisily when I get back to the table.

"So what do you want to do now?"

"I don't know," I said. "Go to Sam's and meet Anthony, I guess."

"Is that what you really want?" asks Meg.

"No, what I really want is to be happy a good percentage of the time. I really don't have the leisure to be so depressed."

"Fine." Meg is anxious to leave. "We'll go to Sam's." She stands and takes one final sip of her drink, grabs her purse.

I follow suit and look into the crowd as we begin to step to the door, those people waiting to eat.

Sometimes I catch these peripheral glances of men who almost might be Eric, a certain haircut, or a tilt of the head in one given direction, that kind of lopsided grin. But it's rarely ever, not really, not the same. I want to take them in my arms for that one split second and concentrate on that one feature and love them fully for reminding me of exactly what I had, before I remember what I lost and all I can do is smile sarcastically and move away, laugh off some re-

mark. I play this game better than Eric ever could.

The parking lot is full of cars and the moon is out and the weather is warm and I wonder if Anthony is having fun with Roy.

Meg waves and drives to the stoplight.

I sit down in my car, and slide the key in the ignition.

My eyes are watering...it must be the weather.

"Start, start, start."

The engine is floundering.

"Goddamnit, start."

The lights come on on the dash. I don't know what they mean.

"This car is ridiculous," Eric said at some gas station in Utah. "It keeps fucking up while traveling, but it's fine so long as it doesn't have to sit in one place for a while."

"That's irony for you," I said, balancing my hip against the passenger door, impatient, tapping my cigarette over one finger.

Eric tilted his head out of the hood of the car, wiping sweat off with an oily hand. "Yeah, the irony's killing me."

I push my foot off the clutch and lean my head back putting my hands on the wheel. I'm bonding with the car.

Key slides in again, foot hits pedal, hand wipes cheek dry.

This day has just been too good for words, in fact my life is so damn wonderful....

Engine roars out into the night and the church across the street picks up shadows in places where it shouldn't, and I think I see his car but it's only the old lady with the lizard pin.

The irony's killing me, too.

David's Face

Matthew Leggett

David Wojnarowicz
I see your face
in the grave of your life
ascending
through chunks of cement
ripped from hot city streets
where you begged
for food
half out of your mind
and hated life
with every cell
until it was slowly
stolen from you
and you realized
a ravaged need
for your star
to shine in darkness.

I would kiss your lips
the same ones
that screamed bloody murder
and now lay slack
revealing teeth
like skeletal kernels of corn.
I would kiss your eyes
that saw unspeakable acts
and projected them like a
nightmarish Drive In Theater.
I would blow you a goodbye kiss
as you break free
of garbage and hate and memory
and rise like an angel of fire
winking at me, and going so high
you seem to live forever.



Arbol de Primavera by Afra Koopman; Photograph.

About the Judges

Literary Judge

Ethan Hauser grew up outside of Boston and studied Art History at Swarthmore College. He also holds an M.A. in English from Hollins College and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from UNCG. A 1995 Heekin Foundation Publisher-Finalist, his fiction and non-fiction have appeared in *Confrontation*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, and *Literal Latte*. Another short story is forthcoming in *The New Virginia Review*. He lives in Greensboro, in a building named “The Dixie.”

Art Judges

Thaddeus Watkins and Rusty Walden are a husband and wife creative team who have exhibited and sold their fine art photography internationally. They first joined forces at UNC-Chapel Hill as yearbook photographers on the *Yackety Yack* staff and have continued to inspire each other for 15 years. They currently own and operate an art gallery in conjunction with their commercial photography studio in downtown Greensboro. Their advertising clients include Hanes Her Way, Performance Bicycle, L’eggs Hosiery, and Cone Mills.

Upcoming Events

UNCG Department of Art:

The McIver Gallery, October 5, 1996 - November 2, 1996

The North Carolina State University System Undergraduate Student Juried Art Exhibition.

All undergraduate students 16 years of age or older who are currently enrolled as students in art programs. For more information, contact Pat Wasserboehr at 334 5248.

UNCG Department of Dance:

April 25 - 27, Student Concert. Tickets are \$5, \$3, \$2.

April 28, 2 pm, End of Semester Showing (free)

May 11, Alumni Concert in honor of Gay Cheney's retirement. (free concert but tickets are necessary).

All concerts are held in the Dance Department Theater on Walker Avenue and begin at 8 pm. For more information and reservations call (910) 334-5570.

UNCG Department of Theatre:

"The Illusion", April 24-27. Performance will be held in Taylor theatre at 8 PM; and at 2 PM on April 28th. Individual tickets are \$10 for adults; \$8 for senior citizens; and \$5 for students. Tickets are on sale April 15 at the University Box Office in Elliot Center. Call 334-4849 from noon to 4:30 PM weekdays.

UNCG Summer Theatre 96:

"Blithe Spirit" by Noel Coward, June 5-8, 12-15; Taylor Theatre at 8 PM.

"Ravenscroft" by Don Nigro, June 19-22; Taylor Theatre at 8 PM.

"Young Black Beauty" by Aurand Harris, June 25-28 at 10 AM; June 29 at 2 PM; Taylor Theatre.

"The Compleat Works of Wllm Shkspr (abridged) by Jess Borgeson, Adam Long, and Daniel Singer, June 26-29; Taylor Theatre at 8 PM

"Oleanna" by David Mamet, June 9, 16, 23 at 2 PM; June 10-11, 17-18, 24 at 8 PM; Taylor Theatre.

UNCG Theatre Season 1996-97:

"Oleana" (summer revival), Aug. 22-25 at the Curry Auditorium.

"Fires in the Mirror" by Be Boyd, Sept. 11-15 at the Curry Auditorium.

"The Cocanuts" by Jim Wren, Oct. 2-6 at the Aycock Auditorium.

"Our Town" by Tom Behm, Oct. 30-Nov. 3 at the Taylor Theatre.

"Equus" by Marsha Paluadan, Nov. 13-17 at the Taylor Theatre.

"The Ice Wolf" by Anna Ward, Dec. 3-8 at the Taylor Theatre

"Bambi", Jan. 23-29 NCTYP Tour.

"Marriage of Figaro" by Alan Cook, Feb. 5-9 at the Curry Auditorium.

"Comedy of Errors" by Susan Reid, Feb. 19-23 at the Taylor Theatre.

"Romona Quimby" by Katie Childers, Mar. 17-23 at the Taylor Theatre.

"Spring Shorts", Apr. 16-20 at the Taylor Studio.

"Long Time Since Yesterday" by John Gulley, Apr. 23-27 at the Taylor Theatre.

UNCG Department of Clothing and Textiles:

"Spring Fashion Exhibition", April 25, 6:00 pm at the Curry Auditorium.
(Free) for further information contact the CTX office at 334-5250.

